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वाक्यशेषः

Completing the Sentence: Ellipsis and Anuvṛtti

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Abstract

Vākyaśeṣa, "the remainder of the sentence", is the device by which the reader supplies a word the author has left out. Kauṭilya defines it as "that by which a sentence is completed", with a simile from his discussion of calamities — "and loss of activity for a king, as for one whose wings are cut" — in which "of a bird" is the word to be supplied. Suśruta defines it as "the unstated word by which a sentence would be completed": in a list "of the head, hands, feet, sides, back, belly and chest", "of the person" is understood without being said. Cakrapāṇi gives the fullest account: a word the teacher did not make in the sentence, for the sake of brevity, which is supplied because it is understood — *asti* ("there is") in a sentence of Caraka's Sūtrasthāna, *māṃsa* ("meat") in "with soups of jāṅgala" — and he adds the limit: only those words are supplied "which are understood even though not inserted". Kauṭilya's own definition of a sentence — "a group of words, when the sense is complete" — explains why the device is needed, and the Mīmāṃsā rule that doubtful meanings are settled "from the remainder of the passage" shows a second, wider sense of the same term. This article distinguishes vākyaśeṣa from *yoga* and *arthāpatti*, and answers three objections: that ellipsis is the fault of deficiency, that supplying words lets the reader rewrite the text, and that the tantrayukti and the Mīmāṃsā senses are unrelated. It concludes that vākyaśeṣa is the contract of brevity between a śāstra and its reader, and that its modern forms are ellipsis resolution, the reading of compressed technical notation, and the editor's bracketed supplement.

Keywords: vākyaśeṣa; tantrayukti; ellipsis; adhyāhāra; anuvṛtti; ākāṅkṣā; sentence; brevity; lāghava; context; Mīmāṃsā; Arthaśāstra; Suśruta; Caraka; sūtra style

1. प्रवेशः · Place in the lists

Vākyaśeṣa is seventeenth in Kauṭilya's list, twelfth in Suśruta's and eighth in Caraka's. Caraka places it in his opening group, beside *yoga* (TY-04) and *padārtha* (TY-05): the devices one needs merely to read a sentence correctly. In a tradition that prizes brevity — the sūtra style, the compressed verse — this is no small matter. A reader who cannot supply what is understood cannot read the text at all.

2. लक्षणानि · The definitions

> येन वाक्यं समाप्यते स वाक्यशेषः
>
> छिन्नपक्षस्येव राज्ञश्चेष्टानाशश्चेति
>
> तत्र शकुनेरिति वाक्यशेषः
>
> "That by which a sentence is completed is vākyaśeṣa." — Example: "And loss of activity for a king, as for one whose wings are cut." — There, "of a bird" is the vākyaśeṣa.
>
> Kauṭilya, *Arthaśāstra* 15.1.38–40

> येन पदेनानुक्तेन वाक्यं समाप्येत स वाक्यशेषः। यथा शिरःपाणिपादपार्श्वपृष्ठोदरोरसामित्युक्ते पुरुषग्रहणं विनापि गम्यते पुरुषस्येति ॥
>
> "The unstated word by which a sentence would be completed is vākyaśeṣa. For example: when 'of the head, hands, feet, sides, back, belly and chest' is said, 'of the person' is understood even without being mentioned."
>
> Suśruta, *Uttaratantra* 65.19

> वाक्यशेषो नाम यल्लाघवार्थमाचार्येण वाक्येषु पदमकृतं गम्यमानतया पूर्यते; यथा "प्रवृत्तिर्हेतुभावानां" (सू.अ.१६) इत्यत्रास्ति' इति पदं पूर्यते, तथा "जाङ्गलजै रसैः" इत्यत्र मांसशब्दः पूर्यते। वाक्येषु चैत एव पदाः शेषाः क्रियन्ते, ये ऽनिवेशिता अपि प्रतीयन्ते।
>
> "Vākyaśeṣa is a word not made in the sentence by the teacher, for the sake of brevity, which is supplied because it is understood. For example: in 'the activity of causal factors' (Sūtrasthāna 16) the word 'there is' is supplied; likewise in 'with soups of jāṅgala' the word 'meat' is supplied. And in sentences, only those words are made the remainder which are understood even though not inserted."
>
> Cakrapāṇidatta, *Āyurvedadīpikā* on Caraka, *Siddhisthāna* 12.41–44

3. लक्षणपरीक्षा · Testing the definitions

3.1 Kauṭilya's definition of a sentence

Kauṭilya defines the sentence in his chapter on royal edicts:

> पदसमूहो वाक्यमर्थपरिसमाप्तौ ॥
>
> "A sentence is a group of words, when the sense is complete."
>
> *Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra* 2.10.20

The definition explains the device. A sentence is not any string of words but one that completes a sense (*artha-parisamāpti*). Where the words given do not complete it, the reader must supply what does; that supplement is the vākyaśeṣa — literally the "remainder" that brings the sentence to completion. The Mīmāṃsā definition makes the same point from the side of the words' mutual need:

> अर्थैकत्वादेकं वाक्यं साकाङ्क्षं चेद्विभागे स्यात्
>
> "Because of unity of purpose, it is one sentence — if, on division, (the parts) would be in mutual expectancy."
>
> *Mīmāṃsāsūtra of Jaimini* 2.1.46

3.2 Four kinds of supplied word

Authority	Supplied word	Grammatical role	What makes it understood
Kauṭilya	*śakuneḥ*, "of a bird"	The standard of a simile	"Wings" can only belong to a bird
Suśruta	*puruṣasya*, "of the person"	The possessor in a list of parts	Head, hands, feet … are parts of a body
Caraka (1)	*asti*, "there is"	The verb	A sentence needs a verb; "is" is the default
Caraka (2)	*māṃsa*, "meat"	The head of a compound phrase	"Soups of jāṅgala" in a dietary context means meat-soups

The four examples between them cover the main kinds of ellipsis in technical Sanskrit: the missing standard of comparison, the missing whole of which parts are named, the missing copula, and the missing head-noun. In each case the supplied word is fixed: no other word would fit. That fixity is what Cakrapāṇi means by *gamyamāna*, "being understood".

3.3 Cakrapāṇi's two conditions

Cakrapāṇi's definition states the purpose and the limit of the device. The purpose is brevity (*lāghavārtham*): the teacher omits the word to keep the sentence short. The limit is that "only those words are made the remainder which are understood even though not inserted" (*ye ′niveśitā api pratīyante*). The first condition explains why the author omits; the second restrains what the reader supplies. Together they form a contract: the author may omit only what the reader can recover, and the reader may supply only what the author omitted.

3.4 The Mīmāṃsā vākyaśeṣa

The Mīmāṃsāsūtra uses the same term in a wider sense: *sandigdheṣu vākyaśeṣāt* (1.4.29), "in doubtful cases, (the meaning is settled) from the remainder of the passage". The classic illustration concerns an injunction to lay down gravel "anointed", without saying with what; the following sentence, which praises ghee, settles the doubt. Here the "remainder" is not a single unstated word but the

rest of the stated text, read for what it reveals about an ambiguous part. The two senses meet in a single principle: a sentence is understood from what completes it — supplied by the reader in the tantrayukti sense, found in the surrounding text in the Mīmāṃsā sense.

4. पूर्वपक्षः खण्डनं मण्डनं च · Objections and replies

4.1 Is ellipsis not the fault of deficiency?

> ननु चरकः एव “न्यूनम्” इति वाक्यदोषं वदति। यत्र पदं न उक्तं तत्र वाक्यं न्यूनम्। अतः वाक्यशेषापेक्षं वाक्यं दुष्टम् इति चेत्, न। चरकस्य न्यूनं — “प्रतिज्ञाहेतूदाहरणोपनयनिगमनानामन्यतमेनापि न्यूनम्”, अथवा बहुहेतुकस्य एकेन हेतुना साधनम्; तत् वादावयवस्य हानिः, न पदस्य। वाक्यशेषे तु पदं “गम्यमानम्” — अनुक्तम् अपि प्रतीयते, अतः अर्थः न हीयते। अर्थहानौ दोषः, न शब्दहानौ। प्रत्युत लाघवं गुणः — सूत्रकाराः अर्धमात्रालाघवम् अपि बहु मन्यन्ते। यत् पदं गम्यते तस्य उच्चारणं पुनरुक्तप्रायम्।
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> **Objection:** Caraka himself names “deficiency” as a fault of speech. Where a word is not stated, the sentence is deficient. So a sentence that needs a vākyaśeṣa is faulty. **Reply:** No. Caraka’s deficiency is “lacking any one of thesis, reason, example, application and conclusion”, or establishing by one reason what has many — the loss of a member of an argument, not of a word. In vākyaśeṣa the word is “understood”: though unstated it is grasped, so the sense is not lost. Loss of sense is a fault; loss of a word is not. Indeed brevity is a merit — the authors of sūtras value even the saving of half a mora. To pronounce a word that is already understood is close to repetition.
>
> Śaṅkā–samādhāna composed for this article.

4.2 Does supplying words not let the reader rewrite the text?

> ननु यदि पाठकः अनुक्तं पदं पूरयेत्, तर्हि यत् इष्टं तत् पूरयित्वा शास्त्रार्थं विपरीतं कुर्यात्। अध्याहारः व्याख्यातॄणां स्वेच्छाचारः इति चेत्, न। चक्रपाणिः नियमं वदति — “वाक्येषु चैत एव पदाः शेषाः क्रियन्ते ये ऽनिवेशिता अपि प्रतीयन्ते”। प्रतीतिः न पाठकस्य इच्छा, किन्तु आकाङ्क्षायोग्यतासन्निधिभिः नियता। “छिन्नपक्षस्य” इत्यत्र पक्षिणः विना अन्यः न योग्यः; “शिरःपाणिपाद” इत्यत्र पुरुषात् अन्यः न सन्निहितः। यत्र अनेकं पदं पूरयितुं शक्यं, तत्र न वाक्यशेषः, किन्तु संशयः — सः “सन्दिग्धेषु वाक्यशेषात्” इति मीमांसान्यायेन प्रकरणतः निर्णेयः, न इच्छया।
>
> **Objection:** if the reader supplies an unstated word, he can supply whatever he likes and turn the meaning of the śāstra upside down. Supplying words is the commentators’ licence. **Reply:** No. Cakrapāṇi states the rule: “only those words are made the remainder which are understood

even though not inserted." What is understood is not what the reader wants but what is fixed by expectancy, compatibility and proximity. In "one whose wings are cut" nothing but a bird is compatible; in "head, hands, feet …" nothing but the person is at hand. Where more than one word could be supplied, there is no vākyaśeṣa but a doubt — to be settled from the context by the Mīmāṃsā rule "in doubtful cases, from the remainder of the passage", not by preference.

Śaṅkā–samādhāna composed for this article.

4.3 How does vākyaśeṣa differ from yoga and arthāpatti?

ननु योगः अपि वाक्यस्य पूर्तिः — विप्रकीर्णानां पदानाम् एकवाक्यीकरणम्। अर्थापत्तिः अपि अनुक्तस्य प्रतिपत्तिः। अतः वाक्यशेषः ताभ्याम् अभिन्नः इति चेत्, न। योगे सर्वाणि पदानि उक्तानि, केवलं विप्रकीर्णानि — तेषां सम्बन्धः क्रियते। वाक्यशेषे पदम् एव अनुक्तं — तस्य पूरणं क्रियते। अर्थापत्तौ अनुक्तः अर्थः वाक्यान्तरम् — "नाप्रियहितद्वारेणाश्रयेत" इति पूर्णं वाक्यम्। वाक्यशेषे तु एकं पदं, येन स एव वाक्यः पूर्यते, न अन्यः वाक्यः उत्पद्यते। योगः क्रमस्य, वाक्यशेषः पदस्य, अर्थापत्तिः वाक्यार्थस्य — त्रयः भिन्नाः व्यापाराः।

Objection: yoga too completes a sentence — it makes scattered words into one sentence. Arthāpatti too conveys what is unstated. So vākyaśeṣa does not differ from them. **Reply:** No. In yoga all the words are stated, only scattered; their connection is made. In vākyaśeṣa the word itself is unstated; it is supplied. In arthāpatti the unstated matter is another sentence — "he should not approach him through what is unpleasant and harmful" is a complete sentence. In vākyaśeṣa it is a single word, by which the same sentence is completed; no other sentence arises. Yoga concerns order, vākyaśeṣa a word, arthāpatti a further proposition — three different operations.

Śaṅkā–samādhāna composed for this article.

5. सिद्धान्तः · The settled view

लाघवार्थं वक्त्रा अनुक्तस्य, आकाङ्क्षायोग्यतासन्निधिभिः नियमेन प्रतीयमानस्य, एकस्य पदस्य पूरणं, येन तत् एव वाक्यम् अर्थपरिसमाप्तिं लभते, सः वाक्यशेषः।

"Vākyaśeṣa is the supplying of a single word left unstated by the speaker for brevity, which is understood with certainty through expectancy, compatibility and proximity, by which the same sentence attains completeness of sense."

Definition composed for this article.

The definition keeps Cakrapāṇi's two conditions (brevity, being understood), states what governs the understanding (the three conditions of sentence-meaning recognised by the Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā schools), and ties the device to Kauṭilya's definition of a sentence (completeness of sense).

6. आधुनिकसंवादः · The modern counterpart

Classical form	Modern counterpart
The supplied word	**Ellipsis resolution** in linguistics and natural-language processing
Brevity of the sūtra style	Compressed technical notation: formulae, abbreviations, telegraphic clinical notes that the trained reader expands
"Only what is understood"	The editor's **bracketed supplement** [ ] in a translation or critical edition, kept to what the text requires
Mīmāṃsā: doubt settled from the rest of the passage	Disambiguation by context; reading a term in a statute or protocol by its surrounding provisions
Pāṇinian *anuvṛtti*	Variables and headings carried over in a structured document; default scopes in code

A clinical note such as "BP 140/90, afebrile, chest clear" is a string of vākyaśeṣas: the trained reader supplies "the patient's blood pressure is …". Like Caraka's sentences, it is written for a reader who can recover exactly what was omitted — and it becomes dangerous when read by someone who cannot.

7. प्रयोगाः · Uses

7.1 In research

When translating or editing a śāstric text, mark every supplied word, and supply only what Cakrapāṇi's rule allows — what is understood with certainty. Where more than one supplement is possible, say so and give the evidence of the context. In one's own writing, omit only what the intended reader can recover; when writing for readers outside the field, supply what specialists would omit.

7.2 In teaching

Give students a sūtra or a terse verse and ask them to write it out in full, marking each supplied word and the reason it is certain. The exercise trains attention to grammar and to the conventions of the field at once.

7.3 In daily life

Everyday speech is full of ellipsis, and most misunderstandings arise when the hearer supplies a different word from the one the speaker omitted. When in doubt, follow the Mīmāṃsā rule: look to the rest of what was said before supplying.

8. अभ्यासः · Exercise

1. Take any five consecutive sūtras of the Aṣṭādhyāyī and write out what each means with the words supplied by *anuvṛtti*. Mark each supplied word.
2. Find two sentences in Caraka or Suśruta where a word must be supplied. Classify each by the table in §3.2.
3. Take a clinical or technical note from your field and expand it into full sentences. Which supplied words are certain, and which would a non-specialist get wrong?

9. उपसंहारः · Conclusion

Vākyaśeṣa is the contract of brevity between a śāstra and its reader. Kauṭilya supplies the standard of a simile, Suśruta the whole of which parts are named, Caraka the verb and the head-noun; Cakrapāṇi states the purpose (brevity) and the limit (only what is understood); Kauṭilya's definition of a sentence explains why completion is needed, and the Mīmāṃsā rule extends the device to the settling of doubt from context. Ellipsis is not the fault of deficiency, because no sense is lost; supplying is not rewriting, because what is supplied is fixed by expectancy, compatibility and proximity; and the device is distinct from yoga and arthāpatti. Every trained reader of compressed technical writing practises it daily.

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